

# Research is not so Black and White;

## Exploring how the Emotional Self **Colours** the Research Process

Qualitative research, unlike quantitative research, acknowledges the *reflexive* role of the researcher<sup>1</sup>. More recently, focus has been paid to reflecting on emotions (i.e. Emotional Reflexivity (ER) ) within the research process<sup>2</sup>.

However, the use of this 'emotional' reflection in research has been positioned differently; with some arguing these reflections are for the purpose of 'controlling for' or, withdrawing the researchers' influence from the 'researched space', preventing the researcher tainting the researched<sup>3</sup>. This practice in turn prevents the researcher from becoming 'over involved'<sup>4</sup>. And so, for some, ER is for the purpose of obtaining access to this 'pure' experience, and for self protection.

Similar to Ian Burkitt<sup>5</sup>, I argue that I 'colour' my research; I am present and within this 'researched space'.

Therefore, I have dedicated a whole chapter of my PhD to my 'emotional journey', treating my reflections as data, and as an extra layer of experience I can draw upon.

'I constantly feel this pressure to be the 'professional' researcher, positioning myself as neutral and 'not really there'. At times I feel I am trying so hard to resist this and be 'emotionally available' that I risk performing something else at the other end of the spectrum. In the end, I realise I am just reproducing this idea that to be 'a professional' you can't also be emotionally available.'

'I know that I am a very aware and 'sensitive' person; I have always felt intensely. I seem to 'make places (as Cataldi discusses) very easily. Listening back, I notice how I seem to 'creatively adjust' so readily to my interviewees, adjusting my responses dependant on theirs. I realise how irremovable my 'influence' is, and how pointless it would be to try to remove it.'

My PhD is phenomenologically<sup>6</sup> exploring how Fire Fighters make sense of emotion and feeling in their work. Using blog entries, field notes and written reflections, I am documenting my felt research journey to compliment that of my interviewees.